

## Rainy Day

It was supposed to be daytime, but it was dark inside the room. It was dark, like in the early hours before dawn. He couldn't tell where he was. His heart began to race at the overwhelming sense of unease, but that passed in an instant. He could see his own two hands, and they were large. He wasn't very smart, but with these two hands he could do a decent range of manual labour. *I'm not a kid anymore. This isn't the tiny room I used to be in when I was younger.*

A thin sheen of sweat coated his brow. It was hot and humid in the room. Even the intermittent breeze directed at him by the swinging fan at his feet felt somewhat moist.

Kitagawa rubbed his face vigorously with both hands before he slowly sat up. There was a figure beside him in the same futon. A human figure, curled up in a cream-coloured towel blanket. He carefully turned the blanket down, revealing the man's bare, defenceless skin. The man was asleep on his side, not even wearing underwear.

Kitagawa's body burned with thirst despite how much he had indulged himself the night before. The other man's breathing was slow and regular, and he showed no signs of waking up. Kitagawa gently rolled the figure onto his back and climbed on top. The warmth of the other's skin aroused him, and he kissed those lips which presently existed only to breathe. His greedy kisses attempted even to take the man's breathing away, and eventually his eyelids fluttered as he emerged from his slumber.

"—Kei...?"

He felt a shiver up his spine. The man had called his name. *His* name. Before, it had been a mere superficial decoration. This man had given it meaning.

Now that the man was awake, Kitagawa entwined his tongue with his. A breathy moan escaped through the man's nose, spurring Kitagawa on. Kitagawa kissed the man's chin, licked his throat, and nuzzled the groove between his collarbones before latching his lips onto his chest, which he had fondled to his heart's content yesterday. He sucked hard.

"Kei—Kei...!"

He closed his lips around the entire nipple, let his tongue flicker over the tip, and bit it lightly. The body in his arms grew hot and damp to the touch. His lover's low gasps rang deep into his ears as the man ran his fingers through Kitagawa's hair, as if silently begging for more.

With his lips still wrapped around the man's nipple, Kitagawa forcefully opened his legs and slid his hips between them. His lover's member that pressed up against his belly button was hard and hot, though not completely erect. When Kitagawa closed his right hand around it, the man let out a short cry.

Kitagawa rubbed it along its shaft, pressed down hard on the tip with his thumb, and tightened his fingers around it. He lovingly and thoroughly caressed the heated and trembling member in his hands, and peered into his lover's face. The man's eyes swam with desire as he lapped up the pleasure that was offered to him; his mouth was half-open, and his chest rose and fell rapidly, unable to hide his arousal.

Kitagawa kissed him deeply while he lifted the man's right leg up. He pushed the tip of his own member into the narrow space in his lover's lower half, rubbing it up against the soft spot that always accepted him.

"Kei—!" his lover pleaded tensely, shaking his head as if to avoid his kisses. "—Not that."

Kitagawa pressed his lips to the man's slender neck and bit it playfully. Still hoisting the man's right leg up, he rubbed his own erect member and smeared his pre-cum on the same spot. This time, his lover covered his crotch with this right hand to block him. Kitagawa pushed the tip of his rod insistently against the back of the man's hand.

"You don't want me to put it in?"

Even in the dim light of the room, he could see his lover turn red.

"It's already light outside."

"I want to put it inside, Takafumi. You're off work today, aren't you?"

"Well, yeah, but..."

"Let me put it in."

His lover shifted his gaze and hesitated at his plea. As Kitagawa kissed him repeatedly and persisted in appealing his desire, Douno's shielding right hand finally fell away.

Kitagawa pushed his tip strongly against the spot which had been opened for him. He had penetrated it numerous times last night, so it was only tight on the way in. He thrust it in far enough for their pubic hairs to tangle together, and began to move in and out slowly.

Back when he had been inexperienced at the act, he used to jerk his hips more forcefully, but he came to realize it only caused Douno pain unless Kitagawa took the time to get him settled in. He could tell it pleased the man's body more when he did it slowly. Watching the man in turn aroused him more.

"Ah—ah—"

Takafumi covered his face with both hands and shuddered. When Kitagawa sped up his movements a little, the man's penis reared into a full erection. Once Takafumi's body got used to the movement, he seemed to feel more pleasure from being hurried a little. As his lover moaned sweetly and writhed, his spine taut in pleasure, Kitagawa remained deep inside him and tightly grasped the base of the man's quivering penis along with his balls. He felt the man squeeze him so hard it hurt. The searing membrane around him throbbed as his lover released his desire.

"...Don't look at me..." his lover pleaded in a trembling voice. "It's embarrassing..."

"We did the same thing last night."

They had done this act numerous times last night, but he felt like Douno's pleasure was more heightened now, in the morning.

"But it's bright... and I can see everything."

It was cloudy outside, and so not as bright as on a sunny day, but they could still see every corner of the room well enough. He remembered now how Takafumi would always turn out the lights before they went to sleep. He lifted his lover's scrotum and stared at the part that joined them. Noticing what was at the end of his gaze, his lover squirmed and tried to edge upwards, but Kitagawa firmly pulled his hips closer. He could clearly feel his member deeply penetrating that tiny spot.

"It turns me on when I can see you, Takafumi."

He soothed the slightly resistant man and resumed thrusting gently. Then, he hoisted the man's twisting body in his arms and, without breaking their connection, sat him on his lap.

"Ah—ah—!"

Douno clung to Kitagawa's neck and moaned in a whimpering voice. Now that he was upright, the liquid desire Kitagawa had released inside him yesterday spilled out and trickled down Kitagawa's penis.

Kitagawa stroked the man's head and whispered in his ear.

"Move like you want to, Takafumi."

"I c—can't."

"Sure you can. I'll help you."

He placed the man's hands on his shoulders, supported the man's slender hips with both hands, and rocked him encouragingly. Gradually, the man began to move his hips erotically without Kitagawa's help. Kitagawa could see his own penis slide in and out of view from the narrow opening. He could hear the slippery sound of their wet flesh rubbing against each other. Juices dripped. His lover's movements grew more frantic, and in moments, the man ejaculated on his belly.

"Did it feel good?" Kitagawa whispered into the man's ear. The man's face flushed crimson as he tried to break their connection. Kitagawa hastily held him back.

"Not yet. I haven't come yet."

He pushed the man down and climbed over top of him. He kissed his lover over and over as he began a slow piston inside the man's body, savouring every move inside the now soft and completely loosened spot.

Kitagawa had barely any memories of his childhood. But the things he did remember were vivid: the interior of the square room, his constant hunger, and the overpowering smell of human excrement which threatened to render his nose senseless.

He may have gone to kindergarten or preschool, but his memories of those years were vague. But one thing he remembered clearly was that his time alone seemed to stretch on forever.

Had he been crammed into that small room since childhood because his mother had gotten sick of raising him? *Then maybe she shouldn't have had me at all*, he thought, but there was no way of asking her why she'd decided to have him. He had no idea where his mother was now. He had a feeling he would go on never to see her again, and he did not want to see her badly enough to search for her. *My mother probably doesn't feel any love for me, anyway*, he thought.

Although his mother would probably not go to jail, he wondered if she would still be punished somehow for what she did. Would she ever regret her actions and feel remorse for setting her son up to murder someone?

Whenever he thought of his childhood and about his father, Kitagawa always felt a smarting pain in a corner of his head, and he would grow restless and irritated. This never used to happen before. He had started to feel irritated ever since he came to realize that what his mother did was wrong.

He reached out to his lover lying beside him and drew him close. He felt the man's warmth, and inhaled his scent deeply. His irritation subsided instantly as if it had been a dream. The smarting in his head grew faint.

"Feel like getting up soon?" said a voice by his ear. "It's almost noon. I'm starting to get hungry."

Douno sat up. Kitagawa was hungry, too, but did not want to be apart from this man just yet. He clung to Douno's naked belly.

"Don't be such a kid," Douno laughed softly.

He gently pushed Kitagawa off and got to his feet. He picked up his underwear, put on his pyjamas which had been strewn across the floor, and left the room. Kitagawa remained lying on the futon for a while, but he began to feel lonely being by himself in the dim room. He put on his

underwear and his pyjama bottoms before slinking out of their ten-square-metre bedroom.

He entered the kitchen to see Douno squatting by the edge of the refrigerator feeding a white cat with black patches in its fur.

"It was meowing for a while by the back door. I totally forgot about its food."

Douno gently ran his fingers over the cat's wet head.

"I know we started feeding it because it comes by often, but I wonder who it belongs to?"

The cat was wearing a collar. It had already been full grown and wearing a collar since the first time it began to frequent their yard. However, the collar had no address, nor did it have the pet's name. The cat could hardly be called cute, but Kitagawa and Douno had begun to feed it since it kept meowing persistently at the back door. Soon, it began to come by regularly in the mornings and evenings. Kitagawa was the one who began giving it leftovers until Douno bought cat food.

The cat began to clean its face after polishing off the food in its bowl.

"She's actually a girl, you know."

"Oh, really?"

Douno picked the cat up. He was right; the cat had no balls as far as he could see. Kitagawa gave the cat's white furry belly a casual rub, and was met with a kick.

"Ow!"

The cat twisted out of Douno's arms and landed on its feet on the floor. It went to the back door in the kitchen and meowed in a demanding way. Douno let the cat out before hurrying back to Kitagawa's side.

"Are you alright?"

The cat's claws had left three clear lines on Kitagawa's wrist.

"Ungrateful cat," Kitagawa grumbled, clicking his tongue.

"The belly is a vulnerable spot, after all," Douno said. "Maybe she was pregnant."

Blood welled up from the scratches. Douno took Kitagawa's hand and licked his bleeding wrist.

"I wonder where we put the band-aids?" he murmured to himself as he left the kitchen. Once he was out of sight, Kitagawa licked his wound once again, which had stopped bleeding.

After putting a bandage over Kitagawa's scratch, Douno opened the fridge and sighed.

"We didn't have much food stocked up. It's not breakfast hour anymore, either... are you okay with fried rice?"

Kitagawa nestled close to his lover from behind and reached below his belly.

"Now, now," Douno reprimanded gently. "What do you feel like eating, Kei?"

"Anything you'll make, Takafumi."

"Then maybe you can have cat food, like the cat."

"That's fine."

There was a moment of silence.

"I was just kidding," Douno said quietly. "I would never feed you that."

"I'll eat anything you serve. Even cat food."

"I said it was a joke," Douno murmured somewhat sadly, even though he had brought it up first.

It continued to rain outside, and the view of the yard was blurred and smoky from the room facing out. Their dog Ao showed no signs of coming out of her doghouse. Perhaps even dogs found the rain annoying.

Douno was outside in the yard with an umbrella, putting a bowl of food in the doghouse. They had taken her in a month ago. Despite having heard from Kitagawa the day before that he was bringing a dog home, Douno had been astonished.

"This is the dog?"

"This is it."

Douno looked down at the sandy dog with white paws.

"But it's... big."

Ao was already a grown dog when they took her in.

"The owner probably got sick of taking care of it," a fellow worker at Kitagawa's site had guessed, judging by how affectionate the dog was.

"I never said it was a puppy," Kitagawa said.

"Yeah, but..."

"I feel like we're gonna get along."

Douno chuckled.

"Okay, fine," he had relented.

Douno came back into the house with a piece of paper, which he put on the table.

"It was in the back of our mailbox. Apparently there was supposed to be a fireworks festival today."

The light-pink flier on the table was blazed with a large heading that said "Festival of Fireworks" and went on to list today's date.

"It says 'may be cancelled due to weather', so I guess it won't happen in this rain."

Kitagawa stared intently at the flier.

"When I was a kid, my life used to hinge on whether the fireworks were happening or not. It was that big of a deal," Douno reminisced as he sat down. "I was excited for the fireworks, of course, but I think I was excited the most for the food stalls. Ice cream, *oban-yaki*<sup>1</sup>, grilled squid.... I only had a little bit of allowance to spend, so I was always super serious about which prize draw I'd do."

Douno sounded happy.

"I wish I could've seen you then, Takafumi."

Douno shook his head.

"It wouldn't have been anything special. I was a normal kid. My marks were average, I was average at sports. If you asked me what my special skill was, I wouldn't have been able to answer. Oh, but I used to like trains a lot back then. I rode a lot of different ones."

"You enjoyed riding the train?"

"Yeah. I liked being bumped along. And it was such a strange, magical feeling to watch the scenery change out the window. I'd completely forgotten about how much I used to love them."

Kitagawa stared at the Douno's face as the man spoke of his memories.

"I want to see inside your head."

"In my head?" his lover repeated.

"I feel like it'd be a lot of fun to watch."

"Well, but it's all just childish stuff."

"It's fun listening to you talk about it. I just thought it'd be fun if I could see it, too, because

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1 A snack made of waffle-like batter and filled with red-bean paste. At festivals, these are made outdoors on the spot.

I've never gone to festivals or food stalls."

"Sorry," Douno apologized suddenly.

"Why're you apologizing?"

"I'd heard about your childhood, but—I forgot."

"That doesn't mean you have to apologize. Your enjoyment belongs to you. You don't have to worry about me. But—" Kitagawa added at length, "these things still feel like they belong to someone else."

"Someone else?"

"When I was younger, I used to hear these big bangs somewhere far away. I found out around middle school that they were fireworks. But I've never been near them, so to me they were always just things that lit up in the distance. And you know how families go walking together to the festivals wearing *yukata*?<sup>2</sup> And not just one or two of them—a whole bunch of people. I always found that so strange. I used to wonder what I'd have to do to turn out like that."

Douno was looking at him steadily.

"I didn't think it was unfair, but I did wonder why I was different. But I found out later that there's no special reason for why my life was the way it was."

Douno stood up.

"—Let's go out."

Kitagawa cocked his head.

"But it's raining outside."

"That's fine. We'll take the car," Douno said firmly.

Their drive took them to a large department store in front of the station. Kitagawa had seen it from the outside, but had never gone in. Inside the store, it was excessively bright and shiny. Kitagawa followed Douno through the aisles, feeling slightly hesitant about whether he was allowed to be here or not.

"Can you find a *yukata* that would look good on him?"

They had entered a shop for *kimono* fabrics, and as a store person sidled up to them, Douno had thrust Kitagawa out to her with these words. Kitagawa was taken by surprise.

"Takafumi, I don't need a *yukata*," he protested.

"You should have at least one. I already have one, so... please," he said to the store person.

They were taken further into the store by two overly-cheery sales associates. He was shown various textiles, but he knew nothing about *yukata*, much less how it would end up looking on him. Just when he thought his mind would drown in indigo, a ready-to-wear article caught his eye.

"How about that?"

He pointed at the indigo on a mannequin in the corner of the store.

"That would be a display," the associate informed him.

"Show me that."

There were black patterns on the indigo fabric. The fabric was already sewn into a *yukata*, so Kitagawa tried it right off the mannequin. The hem was a little short for his tall figure.

"But it looks good," Douno murmured.

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2 *Yukata* is a thin, cotton traditional Japanese dress that is worn during the summer, at summer festivals, or after a bath.

"I agree," the sales associate nodded slightly. "The subdued, mature look suits you very well, sir. We can tailor the hem right away, and you'll be able to take it home today if you wish."

Kitagawa decided on the ready-made *yukata* since he had Douno's stamp of approval and they would be able to take it home within the day. They were told it would take about two hours to adjust the length of the hem. Kitagawa and Douno decided to spend time in the coffee shop inside the department store while they waited.

They had a view of the scenery outside from their window seat. The rain still showed no signs of letting up. In fact, it was raining harder.

"There aren't many people here for a Saturday. I guess the rain must keep people away."

Kitagawa nodded. Douno leaned in to peer at Kitagawa's face.

"Are you worn out?"

"I've never been sandwiched between two people like that and asked 'how's this?' 'how's that?' every minute."

Douno laughed.

"They couldn't help it. We were the only customers there. But it was kind of fun watching you look out of your element."

His lover slowly brought his coffee to his lips as Kitagawa asked him a question.

"Why a *yukata*?"

"Why what?" Douno tilted his head.

"Why did you want to buy me a *yukata*?"

"I figured it wouldn't hurt to have one. I had some money left over from my bonus, anyway."

"But people barely wear them, right?"

"I'm sure you'll wear it if you have it."

They spent about an hour in the coffee shop before leaving to wander the department store. They browsed some clothes, but Kitagawa was blown away by their prices. Some cost half of what Kitagawa made in a month. But if they were being sold like this, he figured there must be people who bought them, too. He wondered what kind of people did, and then realized it was only an idle thought. He wasn't very interested in actually knowing.

They continued to look, but ended up returning to the fabric shop without buying anything. The adjusted hem on the *yukata* was just the right length on Kitagawa, so they asked for it to be wrapped up on the spot.

When they got home, Douno asked him to put on the *yukata* again. He got as far as draping it over himself, but had no idea how to tie the *obi*.<sup>3</sup> Douno appeared not to know either. Kitagawa simply tied it in a regular knot. The *kimono* restricted his leg movement, and he had no idea how to sit properly. He sat down on the low table, knowing it was impolite, and a fleeting thought crossed his mind. *This would be punishment material if this was prison.*

"You look really good in a *yukata*, Kei," Douno said happily.

"I can't really tell." Kitagawa scratched the back of his head.

"It looks good. But I'm glad it rained today."

Kitagawa asked him why.

"This flier says if it rains, it'll be postponed to next Sunday. Next week, let's wear that to go watch the fireworks. I'll look up how to tie the *obi* by then, too."

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3 The stiff sash that goes around the waist and keeps the *kimono* together.

Douno took Kitagawa's right hand.

"We'll go a little early and look around the stalls. I'll tell you all the things I used to like. We'll eat some grilled squid, and we'll wait on the beach for the fireworks to start. I've been a couple times before, and I remember there were a lot of people. We might have trouble getting spots."

"Is that how it usually is?"

"I'm sure it'll be a huge turnout. Enough to make it hard to move. But with these kinds of festivals, it's better to have more people. It can be a little sad if the turnout is small. Anyway, we'll play games and eat, and you can see for yourself what kind of event it is. That way, Kei, you won't have to peek into my head to know what it's like. Fireworks won't be something strangers do anymore. We'll enjoy them together."

Kitagawa clasped the fingers around his hand and pulled them close.

"Kei?"

*I want you, I want you*, he had sought in stubborn pursuit, and the hand he had finally caught was warm. Takafumi was gentle—and he smelled nice, like the warmth of the sun.

"Don't be too nice to me," Kitagawa said in a strained voice, pressing his face against Douno's flat belly. "I'll get carried away."

He was petted on the head. When the man gently ran his fingers through his hair like this, it was so comforting he could almost cry. He remembered how the cat would always close its eyes in pleasure when Douno petted her. *Maybe she feels the same way I do*, he thought.

"Then you *should* get carried away," Douno said. "I think I can handle a little selfishness from you."

"I'll gonna say something I can't take back," Kitagawa warned.

"And what sort of outrageous request is this?" Douno chuckled as he continued to stroke him on the head.

"Stay with me until I die."

Kitagawa squeezed the hand that he held.

"If you'll be with me, I won't mind eating cat food for the rest of my life."

A long silence.

"You didn't need to mention the cat food," Douno said softly, in a trembling voice.

The rain finally stopped in the evening. Cracks formed in the clouds covering the sky, letting the orange rays of the sun seep through.

"Since the rain's stopped, maybe there'll be fireworks," Kitagawa had suggested.

"Probably not," Douno had said in a matter-of-fact tone. "It takes time to set up fireworks. I don't think they could have set them up in that rain."

Kitagawa wondered how Douno could know about such things. Perhaps it was common sense if one lived a normal life.

Ao came out of her dog house once the rain stopped. She barked loudly. As Kitagawa prepared to take her out for a walk, Douno also came along. The dog trotted down the path, heedlessly splashing through the puddles. Its white paws quickly turned grey.

Once they reached the riverside, Kitagawa took Ao's leash off. Newly freed, the dog dashed around the river bank and rolled around in glee. Once in a while she came back to Kitagawa, then went darting off again.

Kitagawa had always wanted a dog. He had wanted one badly. Now, he realized it was not so much because he had a particular attachment to dogs.

It was because families with dogs looked happy. He had felt like if he got a dog himself, he would become part of that happy circle. Perhaps he had seen a dog as a symbol of happiness.

He gazed absently at Ao, who seemed to be having enough fun by herself.

"Kei," a voice called him. He turned around.

"I'm thinking we should save up and... maybe go on a trip next year."

"A trip?"

"I'm thinking Spain."

"Spain?"

He had heard of it, but hadn't the faintest idea where it was. Somewhere below the United States, perhaps?

"That's where the Sagrada Família is. The foreign church you once drew, Kei. Wouldn't you want to see the real thing?"

Kitagawa brought his hand to his mouth and thought.

"I can do that?"

Douno laughed. "Of course you can. Anyone can travel, as long as you have a passport and money."

"But I have a criminal record."

"It doesn't matter. You can still get a passport. You just have to apply for it."

He remembered the building he had seen in a book. For a period of time in prison, he had drawn fervently because it made him happy to be praised by Douno. *The more complicated it is, the more I'll be praised when I finish it.* He had chosen the photo based on that one thought, but as he went on to draw it out, he began to wonder. This was an incredibly difficult structure even to copy on paper—why had they thought of building something like this? It would have taken much less effort to build a normal-shaped building.

As soon as the thought occurred to him, he began to feel that the peculiar shape was beautiful.

"—It's like a dream."

"It's not. We're going to make it a reality. We're going to the festival, we'll see the fireworks, and we'll go on trips. Your life is going to get hectic, Kei."

Kitagawa clasped Douno's hand.

"And are you gonna be there, Takafumi?"

"Huh?"

"Are you gonna be there beside me all those times?"

"—I will. Two of us would be more fun than one for these kinds of things, right?"

"Okay," Kitagawa murmured.

Darkness fell completely around them. Kitagawa called Ao over, but the dog did not come back on the first try. Kitagawa had to repeat her name three times before Ao finally listened. They leashed her again and slowly made their way back down the path they had come.

When they got home, they tethered Ao to her house and went around to the front door. There was a corner of a piece of paper sticking out of the mailbox. Douno went ahead into the house, apparently oblivious to it. Kitagawa opened the mailbox and saw a postcard addressed to him.

The mailer was Shiba, a former fellow inmate with whom Kitagawa had worked at the

same factory until last year. Shiba had been sympathetic and very caring back when Kitagawa was searching for Douno's whereabouts.

*Sending you my summer greetings. I hope you've been well since then. Things haven't changed much on my end.*

It was a short note, but Kitagawa could sense the man's concern from his words. After Douno had been found, Kitagawa had left Shiba with his address before he moved, but had not been in contact with him since then.

*I'm so happy, I feel like I'm dreaming. So happy, no words can describe how I feel—words overflowed, words he wished he could tell someone.* Kitagawa closed his fingers around the postcard and shed a few tears.